

# NEW EMPLOYMENT LAW IN SINGAPORE

(By Our Malaya Correspondent)

The first year of internal self-government in Singapore, or rather the first year of the left-wing People's Action Party rule in this infant State, ended on June 3 with an important pronouncement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, that in future no employer here could engage a non-citizen (of Singapore or the Federation) except with the specific permission of the Minister for Labour and Law. Announcing this at a Press conference on June 1, Mr. Lee disclosed that the Government would soon be setting up the necessary machinery whereby the employers could be made to observe this stipulation. As regards Government service, jobs would be given to Singapore citizens first, if all things are equal, but to Federation citizens if they have better qualifications.

Few will quarrel with Mr. Lee over his decision to reserve jobs both in the Government and non-Government services to local citizens. In fact, this should have been done long ago by the former Lim Yew Hock Government when Singapore citizenship came into being, or at least by the P.A.P. when it took office under the new Constitution, because no country can create a class of citizens and then leave them unprotected. To those who have taken up the local citizenship and thus cast their lot with this country, Mr. Lee's latest announcement will certainly come as a great relief.

Unemployment is already acute in Singapore. As many as 53,000 were on the Government's register of unemployed, as at the end of last year, while no fewer than 24,000 are receiving regular doles from the Government. And every year tens of thousands who pass out of the high schools will be entering the labour market.

## NO BAN ON NON-CITIZENS

The Prime Minister's announcement indicates that there will be no ban as such on the employment of non-citizens. Nor perhaps is any dismissal of non-citizens at present in employment in this State contemplated. Even to-day thousands of non-citizens are employed in the Government and semi-Government establishments while several times their number are to be found in non-Government institutions such as commercial firms and other private businesses. The new stipulation will apply only to future employment.

Only the prevailing acute unemployment has forced the Government to reserve jobs for citizens. But there is no ban on non-citizens taking up any profession, trade or other business. Here too the competition will be mainly from the local citizens, since under the immigration laws no newcomer can come into this country for employment or for permanent residence. The only exceptions to this are experts and specialists, whose number in any case will not be large. Then there are those who are allowed entry on compassionate grounds like the very aged people, who however, constitute no disturbing factor in the employment field.

Yet another measure by which the Government have safeguarded the interests of the people is the ban which they imposed in December last year on the entry of the following categories of people for permanent residence in Malaya or Singapore: wives and children of non-citizens; wives of citizens who have been living separately from their husbands for a continuous period of five years at any time after December 1, 1954; children of citizens who are six years and over; and children of six years and above of those persons who

have been admitted as specialists and on grounds of economic benefit to Malaya.

That all these new laws and regulations will adversely affect the Indians more than any other race or community goes without saying. For one thing, the large bulk of the Indians here, particularly the Tamils, have not yet taken up local citizenship. They still cherish and foster their ties with India, and their one ambition is to go back to India in the evening of their life. Only the sheer necessity of earning a living has forced them to come to this country. Hence they have one leg here and another in India.

The Chinese, however, burnt their boats behind them when they came to this country. They are permanent settlers. They do not want to go back to China. Unlike the Indians, the bulk of whom earn a living by working for other people, such as Government or semi-Government institutions, commercial firms or plantations, the Chinese work on their own, as retail traders, manufacturers and farmers, or are engaged in other occupations such as cottage industry, pig and poultry rearing, vegetable gardening or fishing, in all of which the entire family is occupied, so much so the Government laws and regulations restricting entry and jobs do not affect them at all.

Therefore, among the immigrant races, only the Indians get a crucial pain in their back whenever the immigration laws and employment regulations are tightened. And since the large bulk of them have not taken up local citizenship, they have only themselves to blame. As the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, has said, they cannot enjoy both the worlds at the same time. They were given all incentives to take up local citizenship. Indian leaders from President Prasad and Premier Nehru downwards, had repeatedly advised them to identify themselves with the land they were living in; the local Government on their part had made the citizenship laws most liberal, in that a mere two-year residence enabled them to register themselves as citizens. And yet they did not avail themselves of the opportunity. Since then, the citizenship laws have been tightened, with the residential qualifications raised from two to eight years. And now, the restriction on jobs for non-citizens has come as a natural development in the course of consolidation of the interests of citizens which no one can describe as unreasonable.

## GLOOMY FUTURE

It needs no great imagination to say that the future of Indians who have refused to take up local citizenship, is gloomy. Under the immigration rules gazetted last December, they cannot bring their wives or children here any more for permanent residence. Now the question is, how long will they be able to retain their jobs or occupations here? No country in the world would permit non-citizens to drain the country's wealth away or enjoy the good things to the detriment of its citizens' interests.

In view of the acute unemployment which will definitely be further aggravated with more and more young men coming into the employment market year after year, it is quite possible further discriminatory measures against non-citizens may be adopted to safeguard the interests of citizens. As there are already several thousands of citizens on the unemployed list, non-citizens are not likely to get

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